

School Organizational Solutions (SOS), LLC

**Evaluation of the
Indianapolis Mayor Sponsored
Charter Schools**

**Tindley Renaissance
Second Year Site Review**

12/09/2014

Conducted by:

**Dr. Terrence Harewood
Cheryl McLaughlin
Lucy Witte**

Second Year Site Visit Report

Completed by Members of School Organizational Services (SOS), LLC

Name: Tindley Renaissance Academy

Date of Review: 12/9/2014

Year in the charter contract: Year Two

Site visit evaluation team members: Dr. Terrence Harewood, Cheryl McLaughlin, and Lucy Witte

Sub-questions addressed in review:

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?
- 4.2 Are the teaching pedagogies consistent with the school's mission?
- 4.3 For secondary students, does the school provide guidance on and support and preparation for post-secondary options?
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?
- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?
- 4.9 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to students with special needs?
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related access and services to students with limited English proficiency?

Second Year Review: The following report provides key findings from Tindley Renaissance Academy based upon the second year site review conducted by School Organizational Solutions (SOS), LLC. Team members Cheryl McLaughlin, and Terrence Harewood completed a day of classroom observations prior to the Site Team visit. Team member Lucy Witte, who has expertise in special education and experience as a Special Education Director in several large Indianapolis area school districts, completed a full day of special education file reviews, including interviews with key Tindley Collegiate special education personnel prior to the Site Team visit. During the official Site Team visit on December 9, 2014, the site team members conducted stakeholder interviews and document and evidence reviews in order to address the performance indicators of the Mayor's Charter School Performance Framework as outlined above. The process for this evaluation is iterative and the report, along with follow-up meetings, is designed to corroborate information

provided to regulatory bodies and to provide useful feedback to the Mayor's office, school leaders and stakeholders.

The judgments in the report are based upon evidence collected during the process of the school visits. As stated in the Site Visit Protocols for Mayor-Sponsored Charter Schools: "Evidence comes from observations, interviews, and document reviews. The site visit evaluation team should build a base of evidence for each of its findings that would reasonably lead any set of individuals to come to a similar judgment of the school's programs and practices.

Introduction

On December 9, 2014, three site visitors conducted the 2014 Second Year Review of Tindley Renaissance Academy. Tindley Renaissance, the flagship elementary school of the Tindley Accelerated Schools Network, serves just under 500 scholars in grades Kindergarten through 4th grade, and is currently in its second year of operation. This report represents an evaluation about performance in each of the standards and indicators that are the responsibility of SOS, LLC. to evaluate for this particular school. These indicators: 4.1, 4.2, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6, 4.7, 4.8, 4.9, and 4.10 are outlined in the Performance Framework.

The Site Team engaged in a number of evidence-collecting activities. The focus of this site visit was to gauge perceptions of key stakeholders at the school in relation to the areas of the performance framework that are part of the evaluation. The team conducted focus group discussions with scholars, staff, special education instructor(s), and parents, as well as interviews with the school administrators. Classroom observers also spent half-day observing scholars and teachers prior to the site visit.

As a disclosure, the site team was especially meticulous in this review in response to the school's D rating on the 2014 Indiana A-F accountability ratings. The site team scrutinized evidence to ensure that the school was making appropriate mid-course changes in response to the data. In the following report, standards and indicators are listed with relevant evidence given related to the performance criteria. Following the discussion of each indicator, a summary of strengths and areas for attention are provided for the core question.

Summary Findings

- 4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.2. Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.4 Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.6 Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.7 Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?
Finding: **Meets Standard**
- 4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations related to access and services to English as a Second Language (ESL) students?
Finding: **Meets Standard**

Key Interpretations

4.1 Does the school have a high quality curriculum and supporting materials for each grade?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations

Tindley Renaissance Academy has a well-articulated curriculum framework that was developed by the Tindley Network Curriculum team. The curriculum framework provides scope and sequence as well as additional curriculum planning resources for each core subject. It is delivered through an online system to all teachers and staff, housed on Atlas. According to School Leaders and Staff, The Tindley Curriculum team regularly reviews and updates the online curriculum program.

Classroom observations showed evidence that the curriculum is aligned with state standards as well as common core standards. All classrooms posted state standards, learning objectives, and a daily schedule. All classrooms used learning ladders to deliver lesson plans on a daily and weekly basis. Stakeholder focus groups provided evidence that, through the use of learning ladders, students and parents had also developed an understanding of what the students were learning and what the objectives were.

Tindley Renaissance Academy also reviews scope and sequence according to results from recent standardized and teacher made tests. There is a process in place to modify scope and sequence utilizing the Academic Enhancement (AE) period to reteach standards based on identified gaps in the curriculum. Data from the most recent tests determines which students need to attend the AE program that takes place after regular school hours.

The site team judged Tindley Renaissance Academy as Meets in this standard.

Other Areas of Strength:

- There is a well-articulated online curriculum framework developed by the Tindley Network Curriculum Team providing scope and sequence and resources to support instruction at TRA that is based on common core and state standards.
- Teacher lesson plans are developed according to a backward design process and become the framework for comprehensive learning ladders which all teachers use to deliver, and all students use to learn, the daily and weekly objectives.
- TRA regularly reviews scope and sequence and there is a process in place to modify based on identified gaps in the curriculum.

- TRA identified large quantities of additional resources used to deliver and supplement the curriculum. The site team saw evidence of textbook resources, as well as a multitude of other curriculum resources being utilized in classrooms.

Recommendations:

- None

4.2 Are the teaching processes (pedagogies) consistent with the school's mission?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations:

Two site team members spent a day observing all of the classrooms at Tindley Renaissance Academy. The results of these observations formed the basis of the evidence used to evaluate this standard. Classroom observers spent 8 hours and 18 minutes observing 23 classrooms, 448 students, and 23 teachers. On average, each observation lasted 22 minutes and the observed student to teacher ratio was 19:1. Detailed analysis of the data provided significant evidence regarding pedagogical practices at Tindley Renaissance Academy that led to a judgment that the school meets this standard. Classroom observations and teacher focus groups showed evidence that curriculum is being implemented in classrooms according to its design and instruction is focused on core learning objectives that align with state standards.

Teachers and school leaders reported that instructional strategies are also provided by the Tindley Network Curriculum Team through the online program. Many of these strategies focus on higher order thinking skills with emphasis on: Analyze, Compare, Contrast, Apply, Summarize, and Sequence. There is a regular audit of lesson plans by the Curriculum Department as well as the TRA administrative team.

Classroom observers saw evidence that a number of different instructional strategies were being utilized in the classrooms, including whole group, small group, differentiation, whole brain strategies, Lemov strategies, and Depth of Knowledge strategies which inspire higher order thinking skills to be infused throughout lessons.

School leaders and teachers described a process where the TRA school leaders (whom teachers refer to as Coaches), conduct weekly walk-throughs often video-taping the teachers delivering lessons.

Coaches then meet on a weekly basis with the teachers to provide feedback and set goals as to how the teachers can improve their instruction and the delivery of learning objectives. School leaders describe the process as a six step Coaching /Feedback process to improve instruction.

Evidence showed that TRA provides teachers with a toolkit of specific strategies to develop rigor in classrooms. Strategies include providing PD on Close Reading techniques and utilizing the Depth of Knowledge Levels in designing lesson plans and delivering instruction. Classroom observers saw evidence of challenging content and rigor in a majority of classrooms.

Areas of Strength:

- Site team observed curriculum being implemented according to its design in classrooms.
- Site team observed standards based lessons being delivered in all classrooms with high levels of rigor and challenge.
- Site team observed whole brain strategies, as well as Doug Lemov strategies, and Depth of Knowledge framework, being utilized in a majority of classrooms.
- Multiple instructional strategies (whole group, small group) were observed in all classrooms.
- Teachers refer to school leaders as “coaches” and describe a comprehensive six step coaching process being used at TRA on a weekly basis, to improve instruction.
- Site team saw evidence of Depth of Knowledge and Text Dependent Questions framework, as well as Close Reading techniques being utilized in many classrooms.
- Student focus groups provided work and spoke about assignments that showed evidence of rigorous and challenging content and concepts being taught at TRA.

Recommendations:

- None

4.3. For secondary students, does the school provide sufficient guidance on and support preparation for post-secondary options?

This standard is not applicable for Tindley Collegiate since the school only serves students from grades four through eight.

4.4. Does the school effectively use learning standards and assessments to inform and improve instruction?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations

The Tindley Renaissance Academy teachers and school leaders reported that TRA uses a variety of assessments to monitor the success of students in mastering the standards and core learning objectives. The school administers the NWEA test three times a year, STEP Literacy Assessment (Strategic Teaching and Evaluation of Progress) three times a year, Acuity three times a year, ISTEP, IREAD, ISTAR, and Tindley interims twice a year.

The school leader reported that the biggest conclusion the school has drawn from examining reasons as to why TRA received a D grade last year is that the staff did not understand data-driven instruction. There was no system or cycle in place that provided constant monitoring of data on student achievement. The school has made a mid-course correction to ensure that all teachers use data at the end of every lesson this year. The school leader is re-orienting the entire community towards Mastery and has set clear goals for the school. Last year only 43.5% of 3rd Grade Scholars achieved a score of “Pass” or “Pass Plus” on the ISTEP test. This year the school has a goal that 70% or more of the TRA scholars will pass ISTEP.

The school has implemented Mastery Friday which is a day filled with mini assessments in order for the students to be able to show what they have learned for the week. Student focus groups mentioned Mastery Friday and could also articulate their own Mastery (Individual) Learning goals.

Teachers report that a data dive is utilized following each major standardized test. The teachers assess and examine the data to determine which students will attend the Academic Enhancement sessions that occur at TRA each day following regular school hours. AE curriculum is planned based on the results of the data. This year a majority of the TRA students are attending the AE sessions. Students attend based on the results of test scores – some needing standards re-taught and some needing enhanced rigor.

Teachers and school leaders report that all students have individual learning plans (ILP) which are shared with students and parents at the beginning of the year, updated midyear and evaluated at the

end of the year. TRA has also implemented an Instructional Leadership Team which advises the School Leadership Team on academic matters on a bi-monthly basis using last year's data for goal setting.

Teachers and School Leaders also said there was helpful support from the Tindley Network Curriculum Department. They mentioned that there was a Director of Assessments and personnel who could help with writing curriculum.

Based on this multi-faceted approach to the collection and use of data to drive instruction, the Site Team judged Tindley Renaissance Academy as a Meets in Standard 4.4.

Areas of Strength:

- TRA administers an organized, comprehensive set of tests throughout the year, including NWEA, ISTEP, Acuity, IREAD, ISTAR, and teacher made tests.
- School leaders and teachers report that all students have individual learning plans which are shared with students and parents at the beginning of the year, updated midyear, and evaluated at the end of the year.
- Tindley Renaissance Academy has made significant midcourse corrections including an overhaul of the grading system with a focus on Mastery instead of just “compliance”.
- TRA has implemented Mastery Friday – a day filled with mini assessments for students to demonstrate what they have learned.
- TRA has a set of well-articulated academic goals for the school, spelling out specific goals for each of the standardized tests.
- Data from the standardized tests is used to inform and modify instruction during the Academic Enhancement period.

Recommendation:

- Whereas TRA teachers and leaders communicated the Mastery Goals and the TRA data-driven process, parents did not indicate any knowledge or understanding of a school-wide goal or Mastery Program. School should still try to continue to involve parents in this goal.

4.5 Has the school developed adequate human resource systems and deployed its staff effectively?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations

Tindley Renaissance is the flagship elementary school of the Tindley Accelerated Schools network. Among the services provided by the network, many of the Human Resources functions are centralized and Tindley Renaissance School is able to leverage these resources. It should be noted that the school leader has modified some of the network processes to match the perceived needs of the school. The school leader explained that whereas the hiring process involves a joint venture between the network and the school, the school leader has instituted a multi-layered hiring process designed to recruit and retain talented high quality teachers. As part of that process, the school leader develops a job description with recruitment language that matches the values of the school. The central office posts the job description online on various websites. Potential teacher candidates are initially screened in a telephone interview where, according to the school leader, the focus is on identify mindset and long-term goals etc. The school leader reported suitable candidates are then invited for a face-to-face interview with focus on identifying strengths along five domains: planning and preparation, instruction, classroom culture, professionalism, and leadership. The school leader notes she is specifically looking for candidates who are “catalysts, and who are solutions-oriented.” The next stage of the hiring process involves candidates developing a written response to one of three case scenarios, which applicants are required to submit within 48 hours. When circumstances permit, candidates are also observed teaching a lesson. This multifaceted process is unique to the Tindley Renaissance School and reflects one of the ways the school brands its identity within the Tindley Accelerated Schools network.

Teachers at Tindley Renaissance are also oriented into the school and the district through a three-week intensive network summer institute. The staff also has professional development, local or network, every Friday. Teachers reported that the PD is helpful and the school leader explained that decisions on PD topics are determined based on the academic data and in response to teacher surveys. Teachers receive weekly observations from the school leadership and meet with the school leadership to discuss and receive feedback. In addition, teachers are required to submit a Performance Growth Plan (PGP). The principal cited this as one of the ways she is working to

support teachers' professional growth. In general, the site team concluded that the school has an effective human resource system in place that the school meets standard.

Other Areas of Strength:

- School leader developed a job description articulating specific values she is looking for in the specific candidates. She described a multi-faceted job screening system including a phone interview where she is screening for mindset and long-term goals. This is followed by face-to-face interview in which she looks for evidence of effective planning and preparation, instruction, classroom culture, professionalism and leadership. Candidates are then given a case study and have 48 hours to produce a written response.
- School has also implemented a professional growth plan for teachers, which serves as the cornerstone for the comprehensive teacher evaluation program.
- Teachers are observed weekly and videotaped during informal walk-throughs which are followed by debrief and coaching sessions. Formal evaluations three times a year connect to the individual professional growth plan.
- Teachers reported feeling greatly supported by the administrative team and especially the school leader. One teacher said, "The way I improve is...my coach looks at the videotape with me and asks me, what should you do...then it is up to me."
- PD opportunities are determined through Data Analysis and Teacher Surveys. They have half day Fridays PD.

Areas for Improvement:

- Site team observed and had serious concerns about the amount of time staff, especially administrative team, spends on supervising activities such as before school, lunch duty and afterschool activities.

Recommendations

School might consider hiring auxiliary staff so administrators' skills could be better aligned to support school's academic goals.

4.6. Is the school's mission clearly understood by all stakeholders?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations

A cornerstone feature of the Tindley Renaissance School is a clear and concise mission that elicits buy-in and support by all stakeholders. Whereas the Tindley Accelerated Schools has a general academically rigorous and college-bound mission that is shared by all its member schools, it is

important to highlight how Tindley Renaissance has adapted its focus to meet the needs of the younger, elementary-aged students. The school leadership has made a conscious effort this year to edit the network slogan of “College or die,” to “College Starts here.” The Scholars creed, listed below is recited by the Tindley Renaissance Academy scholars on a daily basis.

As a Scholar at Tindley Renaissance

I work hard so I can grow!

100% is all I know!

When I see a challenge, I never say “No”!

Graduating college is the way to go!

Respect!

Resilience!

And Relentlessness!

RISE UP!

Other daily school wide and classroom rituals promote the schools’ mission. The site team found overwhelming evidence to support a meets standard. All stakeholders could recite or state the school’s mission. Parents and teachers reported that the mission is what drew them to the school.

Other Areas of Strength:

- Stakeholders could all articulate the mission of the school and indicated that they fully supported the mission
- Student internalized the college bound mission and clearly communicated desires and details about where they want to attend college and where their teachers and school leaders had attended college.
- The school’s mission was posted in a majority of the classrooms.
- School infused a vision statement that is more developmentally appropriate for the young scholars.

Areas for Improvement:

- None

4.7. Is the school climate conducive to student and staff success?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations

Having an intentionally designed school and classroom culture, is another crucial element for the Tindley Renaissance School. The school employs an assistant principal for culture whose primary tasks include the explicit and strategic development of a school wide culture that is conducive to student and staff success. The school has instituted a multiplicity of rituals and routines for classroom behavior, hallway movement, and for redirection and refocusing scholars during instructional times. The school leaders noted that while the school has not diminished its focus on culture, a midcourse correction has been to place less emphasis on culture and, in particular, compliance, and focus more on cognition as it relates to scholars developing the appropriate academic skills to match the cognitive demand expected at the school and on state assessments. One of the ways this new focus is manifested as it relates to academics, is a shift from grading compliance-oriented student work (such as completing homework) to the assessment of academic skills. As such, the school leaders noted that the school recognized that there might have been some potential grade inflation during the previous year as scholars received credit for compliance-related tasks, which invariably might have provided a misguided view of how well the scholars were performing. Compliance oriented tasks are now part of each Scholar's Homeroom grade rather than being part of an academic grade. The school leaders note that this new focus on academic skills provides a much more accurate perspective of how scholars are performing and grasping the content. This reflects another important midcourse correction by the school.

The intentional culture results in classrooms generally being run effectively as the focus is on the teachers implementing the schools color-coded behavioral management system with fidelity. The site team saw consistent implementation of this behavior management system. All stakeholders, including parents, teachers and scholars, could clearly explain what each color signifies and parents noted that they encourage their scholars to strive for a "blue day," or a "green day," the two top levels for behavioral management at the school. The site team observed no significant infractions during the classroom observations. The school also produced data illustrating that infractions tend

to be minor (horseplay, classroom disruption, defiance) and do not generally interfere with the learning environment. The 96.6% overall attendance rate also serve as evidence that scholars receive an appropriate amount of time focus on academic instruction. This evidence supports a meets standard.

Areas of Strength:

- All stakeholders could clearly articulate the color-coded classroom management system.
- The color coded system has a restorative element that provided scholars an opportunity to recalibrate and earn a positive rating
- Parent, teachers and scholars cited the TRA structure and order as one of the main reasons they were at this school.
- Teachers reported strong collaboration and collegiality and that they were like a family here.

Areas for Improvement:

- A majority of parents expressed concern that the behavior expectations for scholars K-2 were too rigid and thought the plan should be modified at that level.

4.8 Is ongoing communication with students and parents clear and helpful?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations:

Communicating midcourse corrections and changes this year has been an important goal for the school, especially since many of the changes involve comprehensive changes to how the school assesses academic skills. School leaders, parents, and other stakeholders all report that there is “open and transparent” communication at Tindley Renaissance. The school leader and assistant principal for culture reported the school has had two “parent universities” this year, which were designed to educate parents about the changes and expectations of the school. According to the school leader, “it is important that we develop a partnership with parents...not just partners for good behaviors; partners for academics as well.” The school leader also noted that there is at least one “touch-point” with parents every month. Each scholar at Tindley Renaissance has an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP). The school meets with the parents frequently to make sure they are aware of the components in the ILP and both parents and scholars are expected to sign off. The site team saw evidence of a comprehensive communication plan being implemented by the staff at

Tindley Renaissance. Teachers are expected to communicate with at least 10 parents every two weeks. The school leader reported that many teachers exceed this expectation making as many as 50 or more parents contacts in a two week period. The following additional commendations and areas of growth support a meets standard.

Other Areas of Strength:

- The school has developed a comprehensive plan to communicate with parents that includes emails, phone calls, texts, home visits, weekly newsletters, a weekly progress report that must be signed and a daily life tracker that lists behavior reports and homework assignments.
- School uses Tindley@Accelerated School Facebook page.
- School meets regularly with parents to communicate relevant information through a Parent University format.

Areas for Improvement:

- Parents expressed some frustration at not having an organized system for parents to be involved in the school.

4.9 Do the school's special education files demonstrate that it is in legal compliance and is moving towards best practice?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations:

A comprehensive review of all 57 special education files at Tindley Renaissance was conducted. This review provided critical information regarding general trends in the documentation and delivery of special education services at the school. Tindley Renaissance was found to have instituted numerous systems in compliance with state and federal mandates regarding special education. The school has in place an individual file for each student receiving special education services. These files were also neatly organized and in a locked file cabinet. The school participates in and utilizes the Indiana IEP (IIEP) electronic program. Each student file had a File Log Sheet checklist to make sure the required documents were contained in the file.

The delivery of special education services is a highly sensitive aspect of a school and one that can be potentially litigious and costly. It is important to keep in mind in the area of special education that “policies and procedures are our friends as they protect us in what we do best.” Consequently, schools are encouraged to be proactive in ensuring that the appropriate documentation is made and available on request. Regarding compliancy the file review discovered the following findings:

- 61% (35/57) of the student files contained the educational evaluation. This is essential information for the case conference committee to make informed decisions.

- 61% (35/57) of the student files contained the previous IEP. Again this is critical data to make informed decisions. The site team does realize the challenges of getting the previous school information.
- 74% (42/57) of the files contained the Notice of Case Conference. It is mandated that families are informed of meetings regarding their student's IEP.
- 91% of the students with disabilities attending Tindley Renaissance had an LRE of 50, 5% had a LRE of 51, and 2% had an LRE of 52.

Other Areas of Strength:

- The school files for SWDs (Students with Disabilities) were organized and neat. The files were in a locked fireproof cabinet.
- The school has a Policies and Procedure Manual for special education. Staff also had a copy of Article 7 available for them.
- The school uses the Indiana IEP student management system so that all legally required topics are included.
- Each student file had a File Log Sheet checklist to make sure each student contained the necessary and mandated information.

Areas for Improvement:

- In the file review, there was no evidence that parents received quarterly progress notes. Of the 57 files reviewed there was 0% documentation of progress reports having been completed. The school needs to complete a review for compliancy.
- 61% (35/57) of the files reviewed had the educational evaluation present. More due diligence is needed to obtain the evaluation. It is critical for the case conference committee to make "informed" decisions.
- The FBA/BIP in IIEP is minimally compliant. Perhaps a more robust and date-rich FBA/BIP could be implemented outside of IIEP. The BIP is a valuable tool to provide supports for behaviorally challenged students. Majority of public schools has such a process in place. The FBA/BIP is then attached to the IEP.
- In the file review it was noted that there were 5 instances when a move-in case conference was not convened. This occurred primarily with LSI students. Also there was one conference that was not timely and again it involved a student identified as LSI. According to federal and state mandates, 100% compliancy is the standard.
- There was inconsistent documentation of the school attaining consent agreements from families on IEP agreements. The school needs to review its policy regarding consent agreements.

4.10 Is the school fulfilling its legal obligations to access and services to students with limited English?

Finding: Meets Standard

Summary and Specific Commendations

At the time of the site visit, Tindley Renaissance had enrolled 2 students with English proficiency. Evidence existed that there is a process in place that would easily facilitate services to such students in a timely and legal manner.

Other Areas of Strength:

- File review (2) noted Home Language Survey, ILP present and LAS links

Areas of Improvement:

- No letter home to parent in file